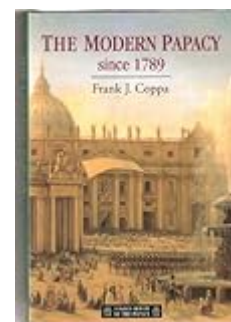


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Frank J. Coppa.** *The Modern Papacy since 1789*. London and New York: Longman, 1998. vii + 304 pp. \$115.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-582-09629-5.

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Frank J. Coppa's *The Modern Papacy since 1789* is a survey of the papacy from the French Revolution to the present. Coppa bases his analysis of the fifteen pontificates, from Pius VI to John Paul II on diplomatic documents, papal encyclicals and bulls, *L'Osservatore romano* (the semi-official Vatican newspaper), and *Civiltà cattolica* (the Jesuit Roman newspaper). The study alternates between a political and diplomatic history and a religious and intellectual history.

Coppa draws on his vast scholarship to analyze each pope's response to political, socio-economic, intellectual and institutional challenges. He argues against the view that the modern popes can be divided into two groups: the traditionalists (Gregory XVI, Pius IX, Pius X, Pius XI and Pius XII) and the innovators (Leo XIII, John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II). Instead, he argues that each pope was more or less willing to accommodate change in his own right, so long as concessions did not contradict Catholic dogma or undermine the role of the pope as leader of the Catholic Church. the author also underscores the double nature of the modern popes as both moral and political leaders. He argues that the popes' steadfast commitment to religious issues, more than the loss of temporal power in 1870, has given the papacy today an unparalleled moral leadership in the world that is

recognized by Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

The scope of Coppa's survey will make it a useful companion to courses in modern history. His discussion of papal reactions to political events will interest students of political and diplomatic history. One finds thought-provoking analyses of Benedict XV's peace efforts in World War I, Pius XI's attitude toward Mussolini, Pius XII's reaction to Fascism, Nazism and Communism, and John Paul II's efforts to bring down the Soviet empire. Coppa also provides an excellent discussion of the papacy in the Italian Risorgimento. Although a good deal of the survey is dedicated to the papacy and Europe, Coppa's consideration of the modern popes' attitudes and responses towards religious, institutional, and political developments in Latin America, Africa and Asia moves away from a Eurocentric approach to the Catholic Church. Furthermore, his analysis of modernism, Catholic Action, the First and Second Vatican Councils, the internationalization of the church hierarchy, and the on-going papal critique of capitalism will be of interest to students of the history of the Catholic Church. The book provides vivid portraits of each pope and includes helpful summaries of the major papal encyclicals and their historical backgrounds.

Coppa's approach to the history of the papacy fo-

cuses on papal responses to challenges from inside and outside the Catholic Church. It is hardly Coppa's aim to underscore his thesis that the history of the modern papacy follows a slow-but-steady process of *aggiornamento* (accommodation) with the modern world, in which the papacy begins to appear as a reactive, rather than active actor in history. Instead, he seeks to explain the unique place the papacy has found for itself in the modern world. This leads him to tackle the question of the Catholic Church's position on modern science by relating it to the perspective of the papacy's claim of superiority over the political realm. He illustrates this point most clearly by pointing to Pius X's position in the encyclical *Pascendi* that if faith were subordinate to science, then one might claim that the Catholic Church must be subject to the state.

Coppa's analysis thus frames the debate on the papacy's responses to both nineteenth-century scientific theories and current advances in biology and physics which continue to challenge the church's conception of the natural order. He also recognizes the importance of Scholasticism on the papacy from the pontificate of Leo XIII to the present, implying that the papacy reconciled itself to the modern world by a return to a Thomistic vision of the state and society—an interesting hypothesis that warrants further consideration. The analysis also

provides helpful summaries of the major concordats and excellent bibliographical annotations. It would have been helpful to have a short explanation in the introduction of the process in which encyclicals and bulls were written for those readers who are unacquainted with the process, especially in light of Coppa's discussion of John La Farge's drafting of *Humani generis unitas* in 1938.

Coppa's study is an impressive work, and the first volume to appear in the new Longman's series on papacy, from its origins to the present. One would hope that the editors will make several improvements as they continue to publish the series. Foremost, they will need a good copy editor to avoid such errors as "August Compte"(9), "a brief *Litteris*"(76), "the Roman college" [instead of the Roman College or *Collegio Romano*, the forerunner of the Gregorian University] (p. 85), "the marches" [instead of the Marches] (105), "liberal protestantism" (144) or "benedict"(161). These errors are a disservice to Coppa's excellent scholarship. Given the broad scope of the text, the editors should also consider including a chronology of major diplomatic, political, economic and intellectual developments, as well as a list of popes for easy reference.

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